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SUBJECT: PHASE 4 VOTER REGISTRATION HUMS ALONG

REF: KABUL 000154

¶1. (SBU) Election and security officials report the voter registration update in Helmand, Kandahar, Uruzgan, and Nimroz is working smoothly, with some ten days of the planned 30-day period complete. The US PRT officer in Helmand on January 28 visited the voter registration site in Nad Ali district, and found it well-organized and busily signing up a sizable number of voters.

¶2. (SBU) Five Helmand districts -- Khanas, Dishu, Washir, Now Zad, and Baghran -- are inaccessible to government representatives because of Taliban presence and do not have voter registration centers. Demand in Lashkar Gah, the capital of Helmand, is unexpectedly high, however, and the Independent Election Commission (IEC) has authorized the Provincial Electoral Officer (PEO) to add two additional sites there. Election officials speculate that persons from the five districts are taking advantage of travel along the main road through the capital to register. Five mobile teams are operating in Helmand as well. The IEC has relocated sites planned for the dangerous districts of Ghorak and Mayan Nasheen in Kandahar to adjacent market areas, an adjustment that worked well in Zabul province in Phase 3.

¶3. (SBU) Turnout remains modest, but officials speculate it may increase toward the end of the update, as has occurred in other phases. As of January 31, 116,918 new voters across the four provinces had registered. This figure is about 10 percent of the existing rolls; other phases have finished at around 35 per cent of 2004/5 registrations, so with twenty days to go the Phase 4 provinces may also reach this goal. The number of women to date -- 25,167 -- appears significantly lower than in other provinces, with IEC headquarters data showing about 20 per cent and site workers' estimates of female participation ranging from 5 to 15 per cent of the total number of new voters. IEC headquarters has yet to confirm whether it will follow its precedent in other phases and add back days of registration for sites which opened late due to delays in delivery of materials (reftel.)

¶4. (SBU) Coordination among Afghan security forces is working well and cooperation with ISAF is ongoing. The Afghan National Army (ANA) deployed 150 men to Nimroz province, where it usually has no presence, in response to the police's request for support during voter registration. UK police mentors have increased their presence in Sangin district, Helmand, to support police voter registration work there. ISAF provided air support to deliver materials in Helmand and Uruzgan. Police in Kandahar arrested suspects after two armed men shot and killed a police officer guarding a women's voter registration site in Kandahar city on January 28. The center re-opened the next day, after police and intelligence

officials completed their on-site investigation.
WOOD